

District Review Executive Summary

Jefferson County School District

12/10/2006 – 12/15/2006

Stephen Daeschner, Superintendent

Introduction

The Kentucky Department of Education conducted an audit of Jefferson County School District during the period of 12/10/2006 - 12/15/2006. This district's last combined accountability index was 75.2 and its classification was Assistance Level 2. Here are the most relevant facts and next step recommendations from the audit.

District Deficiencies and Next Steps in Supporting its

Low-Performing Schools

1. Deficiency	The board of education has negotiated and adopted a contract with the Jefferson County Teachers Association that restricts the ability of the district to properly address needs of students in low performing schools.
Next Steps	District leadership should encourage collaboration among its divisions and schools and the Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA) to provide quality staff at every level within low performing schools, as well as continuity for staff assignments for at least five years. Lack of continuity and quality in instruction and leadership at assistance schools has created a downward spiraling situation with little hope of reversal unless this occurs. Issues such as transfer, length of school day, use of planning time and seniority should be adjusted to meet the needs of these schools. Without a change in these contractual arrangements, these schools will continue to languish.
Current Status of Progress	<p>Deficiency #1 is partially implemented.</p> <p>The district and the union wrote a Memoranda Of Agreement (MOA) for Southern Leadership and Iroquois Middle School that required all teachers to re-apply for their positions. Many teachers either chose to leave or were not selected to return to the two schools. Additionally, an MOA was reached with the union to require a three-year commitment from teachers at these two schools.</p> <p>The district has a preferential hiring plan in place for low-performing schools allowing them first access to the best newly hired teachers. This is a commendable program. It has not, however, prevented low-performing schools from having a large number of Kentucky Teacher Intern Program (KTIP) and alternate certification teachers. It is essential to have strong teachers in schools that have a high concentration of at-risk students, as is the case at Southern Leadership and Iroquois Middle School.</p>

2. Deficiency	District leadership has not defined, designed and implemented an effective system to provide for learning needs of students at the middle school level in low performing schools.
Next Steps	<p>District leadership should disaggregate district-wide middle school data to focus on the success or lack thereof of low performing schools and determine specific issues to be identified and targeted for action. District leadership should design and implement a collaborative relationship with existing support structures. Among others, the HSE program should be integrated in an effective manner. District programs or expected practices that do not enhance academic performance, should be modified or eliminated and other successful practices adopted after the review and input of school staff. School staff should be held accountable for ownership and implementation of these practices. When district programs are implemented, they should be communicated in such a way that the planners are sensitive to the need for understanding and support of those who implement the initiatives. District leadership should then put in place mechanisms to bring this about.</p>
Current Status of Progress	<p>Deficiency #2 is partially implemented.</p> <p>The district has a plethora of useful resources for schools to use in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Implementation of the programs is often impeded by scheduling and teacher training issues. Building level administrators are not held accountable for monitoring the programs. Schools need more computers and/or licenses to effectively implement some of the intervention programs that are delivered via technology.</p> <p>Leadership has not adequately ensured that the Program of Studies is implemented.</p> <p>Struggling schools have unique challenges and barriers in implementing programs. Schools in assistance need special consideration and support that other schools in the district may not need. An example of such a consideration is that high teacher turnover in low-performing schools requires initial training each year in all programs. Such re-training each year and basic support for new teachers, including KTIP requirements, takes precedence over the development of collegial analysis of student work to inform curriculum planning and instruction.</p> <p>Whole-district programs should not “look the same” in every building and should be balanced with the needs of the individual school and the leadership capacity in the school. For example, a low-performing school that has all new math teachers will require more professional development time with the district math department to effectively implement a new math program and to develop appropriate interventions and modifications for diverse learners.</p>

3. Deficiency	District leadership has not fully explored opportunities for action allowed by statute and regulation to re-staff schools through reconstitution or reconfiguration.
Next Steps	District leadership should explore opportunities for reconstituting or restructuring schools with an extended history of low performance, inconsistent staff quality and years in assistance. Any reconstitution should provide for an individualized, systematic process in the superintendent's office to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. The process should be flexible enough to provide prompt response to any situation when it arises. The superintendent should provide direct oversight.
Current Status of Progress	<p>Deficiency #3 is partially implemented.</p> <p>The school board has passed a plan to reconstitute Iroquois Middle and Southern Leadership. The plan is to take place during the 2008-2009 school year.</p> <p>The Jefferson County District Research Department is conducting a study to determine the effectiveness of the reconstitution. Reports are given regularly to the school and the assistant superintendent. The district should ensure that a plan is being put in place to ensure a smooth transition to the new all-boy and all-girl schools next year.</p> <p>The staffing was changed at Iroquois and Southern in 2007-2008 (see Deficiency #1 for details). However, the majority of the leadership teams at both schools were rehired.</p> <p>A district and school level collaborative and systematic process has not been fully implemented to address the reconfiguration efforts. KDE strongly recommends that the superintendent provide direct oversight of the reconfiguration of both Southern Leadership and Iroquois Middle School through the use of the Priority Schools Managers.</p>
4. Deficiency	District leadership does not require school leadership to monitor effective delivery of an aligned curriculum, rigorous and authentic assessment and engaging instruction in classrooms of low performing schools.
Next Steps	District leadership should establish and communicate an unambiguous line of authority from the district to the classroom and back that supports high expectations for all students receiving an appropriate curriculum, rigorous assessment and engaging instruction. District leadership should hold all district and school administrators directly accountable for supervision and evaluation of all staff to provide resources and support to see that this occurs.
Current Status of Progress	<p>Deficiency #4 is partially implemented.</p> <p>The district provides multiple assessments and tools for monitoring student achievement, but principals are not held accountable for actively using that data in work with teachers. Instructional coaches and HSEs use the data in meetings and professional development, but principals are not directly involved in that work.</p>

	<p>The middle school assistant superintendent attends the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings, responds to HSE reports, and reviews student achievement data. This system of monitoring and accountability is insufficient to ensure effective teaching and learning.</p> <p>The principal conducts and oversees staff evaluations. Teacher and administrator growth planning should be tied to staff and student needs.</p> <p>District leadership should closely examine the work of the administrators in the building and consider if all of them are “in the right seat on the bus.”</p>
5. Deficiency	District leadership does not provide a safe, orderly and productive environment for staff and student learning in low performing schools.
Next Steps	District leadership should immediately provide extraordinary measures to guarantee the safe, orderly and productive school environment at the lowest performing schools. District leadership should require the principal to monitor and evaluate all staff members on their ability and capacity to provide safe, civil and engaging classrooms.
Current Status of Progress	<p>Deficiency #5 is partially implemented.</p> <p>The district provides some training in implementation of CHAMPS and Foundations through a summer workshop for new middle school teachers.</p> <p>Mid-year recovery interventions are required.</p> <p>School Resource Officers (SROs) and security guards are present at the school. Because the school leadership does not officially supervise the School Resource Officers, this program is not as effective as it could be.</p> <p>Southern Leadership Academy is struggling to provide a safe, orderly, and productive environment for student learning. The district should consider hiring/re-assigning additional security staff to ensure all students are safe.</p>
6. Deficiency	District leadership neither provides to low performing schools a timely response to requests for assistance nor takes prompt corrective action when a principal’s action or inaction impedes the ability of a school to improve student achievement.
Next Steps	<p>District administrators should ensure timely response to requests for assistance from principals, instructional coaches, priority school managers, HSEs or others with official responsibilities at a school, with special priority given to low performing schools. Policies and procedures should be revised to deliver assistance within days.</p> <p>District leadership should provide prompt correction when principal action imperils the school community. Any behavior, decision or action not supportive of a productive school environment should be reported by a certified evaluator. Such circumstances should then be addressed in professional growth plans or corrective action plans. The principal should be required to participate in specific professional growth opportunities to assist in acquiring the necessary skills to effectively lead. Leadership at Southern Leadership Academy and Iroquois Middle School should report directly to the Priority School Managers who should report to the superintendent.</p>

Current Status of Progress	<p>Deficiency #6 is partially implemented.</p> <p>Timely response from departments to priority schools is inconsistent.</p> <p>Prompt corrective action has not been forthcoming.</p>
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Conclusion

Low performing schools need top quality leadership. The building leader needs to understand what high level quality instruction looks like. Principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools should receive intense professional development in proven methods of leading change for student achievement in such schools. Principals should be held accountable for setting, communicating, and monitoring clear expectations.

The district relies heavily on instructional coaches and other support personnel to implement and monitor programs. Instructional coaches are only in buildings four days a week, which limits their roles to specific tasks such as leading a professional development sessions or collecting data. Exceptional Childhood Education (ECE or Special Education) and English as a Second Language (ESL) coaches also provide assistance and training, but there is often a disconnect between these resources and the overall instructional program. Instructional coaches are pulled from schools each Friday and are seldom available to help their schools with early August professional development and retreats. Instructional coaches are not in buildings often during the month of May, when principals could use their input for plans for the summer and next year.

The district's emphasis on programs for literacy, math, science, and technology provides schools with tools; however, there seems to be no collaboration at the district level to ensure thoughtful implementation of these programs. Pacing guides, Core Content Assessments (CCAs), and writing units are sent to schools from the district. Consequently, there is little building ownership of these processes/products. Likewise, there is no system in place to make sure principals receive ongoing and in-depth training in these programs, which hinders their ability to effectively monitor them.

Other isolated entities at the district level such as Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) support, curriculum support and assessment and planning support provide technical assistance to schools. Without collaboration at the district level, however, critical connections that would benefit students and staff in schools are never made. If the assessment office is using the Combined Curriculum Document, for example, but it is never shared with the SBDM department, then policy advice to a school's SBDM might be flawed or ineffective. This is just one example of why heavy district support without an intentional plan for building capacity in schools leads to dysfunction and confusion.

Staffing issues continue to plague low performing schools. High teacher turnover is a critical barrier to moving schools toward high functioning professional learning communities. Administrators must be able to build teacher leaders and create a sense of teacher efficacy in their buildings. Keeping culturally competent, successful teachers in these schools is critical. With the three-year commitment made by the teachers at Southern Leadership and Iroquois Middle School, this critical need may begin to be addressed.